



King's Research Portal

DOI:

[10.1080/08850607.2016.1177395](https://doi.org/10.1080/08850607.2016.1177395)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Goodman, M. S. (2016). Creating the Machinery for Joint Intelligence: The Formative Years of the Joint Intelligence Committee, 1936-56. *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter-Intelligence*, 30(1), 66-84 .
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08850607.2016.1177395>

Citing this paper

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Creating the Machinery for Joint Intelligence:

The Formative Years of the Joint Intelligence Committee, 1936-56

Abstract:

The Joint Intelligence Committee was created in 1936 to remedy the lack of centralisation in British intelligence, and to ensure that the best possible assessments were provided to military planners. Though it occupied a peripheral position in the inter-war period, it quickly rose in prominence during the Second World War, and from 1942 was involved in every defining moment of the war. Its post-war future was secured by 1944 and a succession of able chairmen ensured its role as a crucial facet of decision-making. This article charts these developments and focusses on the expansion of intelligence as a function of central government.

Creating the Machinery for Joint Intelligence:

The Formative Years of the Joint Intelligence Committee, 1936-56

Origins of the JIC

On Tuesday 7 July 1936, a few weeks before the spectacular opening by Adolf Hitler of the Berlin Olympics, seven men sat around a large ornate table in a four storey building just opposite the entrance to Downing Street to discuss what was known of the growing military challenge that Germany posed for the British Empire. Six of the men were officers representing the intelligence staffs of the Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force. The seventh was a shadowy civilian whose background was in an organisation that had then no official existence, the Secret Intelligence Service. The building in which the meeting was taking place, No. 2 Whitehall Gardens, had made history before when an earlier occupant, Benjamin Disraeli, had held meetings of his Cabinet there.¹ Now the large ornate rooms, modelled in the French style similar to the interior of the Palace at Versailles, housed the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) and the Chiefs of Staff (COS) Committee and it was at their direction that the key figures in British intelligence were meeting formally in committee for the first time. Outside the storm clouds gathered and as the clock chimed 11 o'clock in the Secretary's Room on the first floor the chairman, a Brigadier in the East Yorkshire Regiment, opened proceedings.² The Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) had come into being.

DISCLAIMER: This paper is drawn only from released official records and published sources and the views expressed are mine in my capacity as an academic historian. They do not represent the views or carry the endorsement of the Government. This article draws upon M.S.Goodman. *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee, Volume I: From the Approach of the Second World War to the Suez Crisis*. (Routledge: London, 2014).

¹ W F Moneyppenny, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield* (London: John Murray, 1920). p.285.

² The weather forecast is courtesy of the Meteorological Office archive. I am grateful to Glyn Hughes for this information.

The JIC is one of Whitehall's longest serving Committees. Its origins can be traced back to a decision in 1936 to remedy the lack of co-ordination in the intelligence community. For the first twenty years of its existence, the JIC remained a sub-committee of the Chiefs of Staff (COS) Committee. Its creation, rationale, composition, and focus were overwhelmingly military, yet it was born out of the political anxieties over the military rise of Nazi Germany. It reached maturity in dealing with the very different concerns of the Cold War and the threat of nuclear annihilation. As it developed its own personality, the JIC became a key component in British and allied politico-military debates. It was responsible for the invention of modern all-source intelligence assessment, as it is known in Britain today, and the development of intelligence analysis as a function supporting government as a whole (and not just the naval, military and air staffs). It brought military planners to a greater appreciation of the contribution of intelligence, including that from civilian agencies. Later a similar closeness was forged between Whitehall's foreign and defence policy-makers and the intelligence chiefs, not least from having to argue their disagreements to reach a consensus on JIC papers. Finally, the JIC was the first example of the development of a governing body for a national intelligence community, overseeing the interactions between individual agencies and departments, liaising with overseas services, establishing requirements for intelligence and assessing performance.

The birth of the JIC itself was not easy; nor did it progress according to any preconceived plan. It evolved to meet the needs of national survival and global war. It helped that in its early years the JIC had the advantage of access to perhaps the most comprehensive intelligence on the enemy ever known: the work of Bletchley Park on ULTRA.³ After the Second World War such success in breaking enemy cyphers was difficult to emulate and through the formative years of the Cold War the British intelligence community struggled to reach the levels of penetration and insight against its principal adversaries achieved during

³ For more, see F.H.Hinsley. *British Intelligence in the Second World War*. (London: HMSO, 1979-90).

1939-45.⁴ The JIC achieved some notable successes but also suffered from some serious failings. Ironically, perhaps, the major factors leading to its achievements were mirrored by the factors contributing to its shortcomings. Its performance was a natural consequence of a committee based on consensus, inter-departmental working, and operating at the interface between the worlds of intelligence and policy.

At the time of the JIC's creation in 1936, Britain controlled territories across the globe and occupied a position of international authority. Across Europe this power balance was beginning to shift, with the growing presence of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Soviet Russia. Despite these political developments, 'Intelligence' was very much military in focus and scope and was concerned primarily with gauging capabilities.⁵ The three Services each had dedicated intelligence branches; it was problems in their working relationship and disagreements about their analyses that ultimately led to the formation of the JIC.

The stimulus for its creation lay with Major General John Dill, the Director of Military Operations and Intelligence, yet it would be the great Whitehall 'man of secrets', Sir Maurice Hankey, who would turn Dill's vision into reality. Dill had wished to create a body that would avoid the duplication of effort in the three Services' intelligence branches, and would be charged with ensuring that the best possible intelligence was used for planning.⁶ Hankey's practical solution was to create a sub-committee of the COS Committee, thereby ensuring that, from the outset, intelligence and planning were closely aligned.⁷

The pre-war JIC was a committee that almost entirely comprised military personnel, reporting to military masters, and working on military topics. Its remit meant that it could only produce assessments on topics that had been pre-determined by the COS; it could not and did

⁴ On this, see R.J.Aldrich. *GCHQ: The Uncensored Story of Britain's Most Secret Intelligence Agency*. (London: HarperPress, 2010).

⁵ See M.S.Goodman, 'Learning to Walk: The Origins of the UK's Joint Intelligence Committee', *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 21 (2008), pp.40-56.

⁶ Details are in TNA: CAB 54/3.

⁷ Details are in TNA: CAB 21/2651.

not commission its own papers. This meant that, for instance, there were no assessments on the changing balance in Europe; nor were there any on Hitler's or Mussolini's intentions. The main thrust of the JIC's pre-war focus was on the Spanish Civil War, yet here lessons were not heeded. Concluding that the conflict was amongst second class military powers, the JIC wrote that there could be nothing to be learnt and applied for any future war with Germany, because she was a first class military power.⁸

Nonetheless, the changing nature of the 'threat' and the role of intelligence had meant that, by the summer of 1939, it was considered necessary to include the Foreign Office (FO). To secure its involvement the FO began to chair the meetings.⁹ This helped ensure that by the outbreak of war in September 1939, the JIC had become as much a strategic assessment body as a producer of tactical military intelligence reports for the planners. Despite this broadening into the politico-military sphere, it remained a sub-committee of the COS, whose focus had to be geared towards military matters. It was only in 1940, for instance, that the intelligence agencies MI5 and SIS would become permanent members.¹⁰

Wartime

The wartime JIC was undoubtedly a success. It rose from being a small and specialised gathering of military intelligence officers on the fringes of government into a fully-fledged and integral component of the government's war machine. Two significant events towards the start of the war put the JIC on a correct footing for what would transpire. The intelligence failure to foresee the German invasion of Norway in April 1940, complemented by Winston Churchill's accession in May 1940, ensured that the JIC's position was elevated, as was its

⁸ For instance, see JIC 40, 'Report No 1: Anti-Aircraft (Artillery) Defence', 6 October 1937. TNA: CAB 56/3.

⁹ W9975/9805/49, Note by R.C.Skrine Stevenson [the FO's first Chairman], 1 August 1939. TNA: FO 371/23901.

¹⁰ JIC(40)34th Meeting, 24 May 1940. TNA: CAB 81/87.

ability to commission its own papers.¹¹ A number of other factors contributed to this step-change in its fortunes. In 1941 the JIC was given its own dedicated team of drafters. This ensured that committee members could now concentrate on more important matters than spotting missing commas; in practice it meant that the quantity and quality of assessments improved dramatically.¹² The addition of ULTRA intelligence undoubtedly also made a difference to the nature of the JIC's product.¹³ The final and, arguably, most important aspect was the JIC's wartime Chairman, Victor Cavendish-Bentinck (see below).¹⁴

The role of individuals would be highly significant for the success of the JIC. The Committee had nine Chairmen during this period.¹⁵ It would be a committee chaired by either the FO or the army. In fact that would remain the case until the Franks Report in 1983, when the chairmanship moved to the Cabinet Office, though as it happened the next few incumbents were all former FO people anyway, either on secondment or transfer to other departments. The first two chairmen were relatively short-lived and achieved little, largely because meetings at that time were infrequent and relatively inconsequential.

The reason that the army provided the first three chairs is simple: this was a military sub-committee of the COS concerned exclusively with military matters. One of the early debates concerned the Spanish Civil War and the lessons that might be learnt from that conflict for the future of aerial bombardment in war. This reflected an argument between the Admiralty

¹¹ See D.Stafford *Churchill and Secret Service* (London: Abacus, 1997); Also, G.Bennett *Churchill's Man of Mystery: Desmond Morton and the World of Intelligence* (London: Routledge, 2007). On the JIC's new commission, see COS(40)360, 'Urgent Intelligence Reports', 17 May 1940. TNA: CAB 80/11.

¹² 'Joint Intelligence Staff', Paper by Major General Davidson [Director of Military Intelligence, War Office], 6 October 1941. TNA: CAB 163/5.

¹³ 'The Value and Use of Special Intelligence in JIC Work', Paper in the Admiral John Godfrey archive. TNA: ADM 223/107.

¹⁴ For a contemporary's view see K. Strong. *Men of Intelligence: A Study of the Role and Decisions of Chiefs of Intelligence from World War I to the Present Day* (London: Cassell, 1970). pp.115-8.

¹⁵ Brigadier Desmond F. Anderson [Army] July 1936 – December 1937; Brigadier Roger Evans [Army] February 1938 – July 1938; Brigadier Frederick G. Beaumont-Nesbitt [Army] November 1938 – July 1939; Ralph C. Skrine Stevenson [FO] August 1939 – December 1939; Victor F.W. Cavendish-Bentinck [FO] December 1939 – August 1945; Harold A. Caccia [FO] November 1945 – August 1946; William G. Hayter [FO] October 1946 – November 1950; D. Patrick Reilly [FO] November 1950 – April 1953; Patrick H. Dean [FO] May 1953 – July 1960.

and Air Ministry and so it was thought best to have the army chair meetings. That was the official reason; the unofficial reason was that no-one seemingly wanted the navy in charge.¹⁶

Brigadier Frederick Beaumont-Nesbitt was the first chairman to really make much of a difference. After joining the Grenadier Guards in 1912 he had a varied and fascinating career, including: the Military Attaché in Paris; Deputy, and then Director, of Military Intelligence; and Military Attaché in Washington at the time that the Americans joined the war. In reminiscing about his early years in the army, Beaumont-Nesbitt recalled that as a ‘callow youth’ it was a ‘miracle’ that he survived. Indeed, his memoirs reveal a litany of pranks whilst a young officer, including memories of a champagne-infused stag party and how his appendix almost burst upon being told he was to be sent to fight in the First World War.¹⁷

On taking the chair, Beaumont-Nesbitt conducted a review of the existing intelligence arrangements, resulting in a twelve-page report which he submitted in December 1938. He began by distinguishing between ‘military intelligence’ and ‘political intelligence’ and recommended the existing Committee be enlarged, with the ‘inclusion of a senior FO representative, who would also be asked to act as Chairman’. This proposal was important because, in his words, it would stop any ‘vested interests’ from becoming ‘too powerful’.¹⁸

It would take a series of external events and internal changes before Beaumont-Nesbitt’s vision would take hold. In the meantime he had been replaced as Chairman by the diplomat, Ralph Skrine Stevenson. His appointment was only ever supposed to be short-lived and upon chairing his first meeting he’d already known that he was shortly to move on.¹⁹ His successor would transform the JIC.

¹⁶ For more, see Goodman. *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee*.

¹⁷ F.G.Beaumont-Nesbitt. *Memoirs, 1893-1918*. (Unpublished). Liddell Hart Archive for Military History, King’s College London: Beaumont-Nesbitt Papers. See also his obituary in *The Times* (21 December 1971), p.12.

¹⁸ See Beaumont-Nesbitt’s report and cover note to Hollis, 21 December 1938. TNA: CAB 21/2651.

¹⁹ X7763/G. Letter from C.Howard Smith [Foreign Office] to E.Hale [Treasury], 8 August 1939. TNA: FO 366/2382.

Heir to the Duke of Portland and a relative of the Duke of Devonshire, Victor Cavendish-Bentinck had a privileged Victorian upbringing, enjoying a brief military career before joining the FO in 1918. He was posted to a number of European capitals, and was involved in some of the most important discussions of the inter-war period. Always dressed immaculately in striped trousers and black jacket, Cavendish-Bentinck could often be found walking across St. James' Park accompanied by his pet dog, who would sit with him in the FO each day. Unsurprisingly, it was not long before Angus, a Kerry Blue Terrier who had earlier served with his master in Chile, became known as the 'Intelligence Dog'.²⁰ Unfortunately Angus would become one of the war's casualties. Kennedy Walker-Sloan, one of Cavendish-Bentinck's FO colleagues who worked with him on the JIC later in the war, recalled how one day he was taking Angus for a walk when 'crossing Hyde Park Corner he [Angus] spied another dog coming up Constitution Hill, he shot out and ran straight under a taxi. I had the awful business of explaining to Bill [as Cavendish-Bentinck was known to friends] that his little poodle was no longer with us.'²¹

Cavendish-Bentinck was clearly adept at dealing with senior figures in the military, almost all of whom outranked him. He was skilful at chairing the Committee and ensuring that any disagreements were resolved, particularly the sometimes fraught relationship between the military and the FO. Most importantly, he was able to represent the JIC at meetings of the COS Committee and of senior policy officials in Whitehall and to finesse the inevitable bureaucratic wrangling to ensure that the JIC was influential at the top of government.²²

The other great wartime figure to mention is the Committee's Secretary, Denis Capel-Dunn. Born in Leipzig in 1903, Capel-Dunn studied Modern Languages with History at Trinity

²⁰ P Howarth, *Intelligence Chief Extraordinary: The Life of the Ninth Duke of Portland*. (London: Bodley Head, 1986). p.130.

²¹ Interview with K.Walker-Sloan. 24 March 2010.

²² For more see Goodman. *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee*. pp.61-158.

College, Cambridge, though it appears he never graduated.²³ Following a brief spell in the Diplomatic Service, including a stint at the British Embassy in Havana, Capel-Dunn read for the Bar and in 1938 started practise as a Barrister.²⁴ Capel-Dunn was also a member of the Essex Regiment Territorial Army, and seems to have divided opinion, with John Colvin, who knew Capel-Dunn through their membership of the St James' Club, recalling him as 'very fat, extremely boring...his conversations were hideously detailed and humourless. We all disliked him very much indeed'.²⁵ This was a minority view though and the record certainly seems to have been in Capel-Dunn's favour, and his achievements within the JIC and his plans for post-war British intelligence were numerous and significant. As Secretary, Capel-Dunn was responsible not just for minute taking, but for ensuring the smooth operation of the Committee. Sadly things did not end well for him. He had been in San Francisco in the summer of 1945 taking part in the creation of the United Nations Charter and, together with several British officials had been aboard a plane leaving Montreal for London that had gone missing on 3 July 1945. Although no body was found, the search for Capel-Dunn was abandoned in mid-July and he was presumed dead.²⁶

At the same meeting where Capel-Dunn's death was announced to JIC members, Cavendish-Bentinck informed colleagues that he was leaving to become Ambassador in Warsaw.²⁷ Cavendish-Bentinck and Capel-Dunn were to leave an indelible mark on Britain's intelligence community. In order to understand why, it is necessary to go back to the early days of the war and the first significant intelligence failure that was to befall British intelligence.

²³ I am grateful to Jonathan Smith, the Trinity College archivist, for this information.

²⁴ I am grateful to his son, Barnaby Capel-Dunn, for this biographical information.

²⁵ 'Obituary: John Colvin', *The Daily Telegraph* (17 October 2003). It is also mentioned in 'Awful Widmerpool is Unmasked At Last', *The Daily Telegraph* (30 December 1991). Rather cruelly Anthony Powell had based the character of Widmerpool in *A Dance to the Music of Time* on Capel-Dunn; the dramatisation needs to be read in the context that Capel-Dunn refused to keep Powell on his staff.

²⁶ 'A Liberator Missing, British Officials on Board, San Francisco Staff', *The Times* (7 July 1945).

²⁷ JIC(45)55th Meeting (O), 14 August 1945. TNA: CAB 81/93.

The real opportunity for the JIC came after the failure to foresee the German invasion of Norway in 1940, followed shortly afterwards by Churchill's accession to power and his unstinting support for intelligence work. Churchill believed in the value of intelligence and gave the JIC freedom to operate independently.²⁸ Despite insisting on reading much single-source reporting, he also valued the all-source assessed product of the JIC.²⁹

Although the personalities of its chairman and secretary were important, the JIC would still never have been able to establish itself so firmly without confidence in its own assessments. As the stature of the JIC increased so, too, did its involvement in the war effort. From 1941 onwards the JIC was briefing the COS Committee weekly and all planning papers were expected to have an intelligence input. The creation, that same year, of a dedicated drafting team meant the JIC members could concentrate on the highest priorities, and this reinforced the conclusion that the JIC was now fundamental to the war effort.³⁰ That did not mean that JIC reports were always read or judgments agreed with but, by and large, intelligence was seen as an essential component of policy-making.

By 1945 the JIC had been involved, in one way or another, in supporting Allied decision-making in all aspects of war planning. From Operation TORCH in 1942 onwards, the JIC was similarly an integral component of every single major British operation. TORCH and OVERLORD, the cross-channel invasion of North West Europe, characterised this role. The JIC was involved in a variety of aspects, from the protection of code-words, tactical summaries on the disposition of the enemy and an expectation of what opposition might be encountered, to broader strategic assessments on how the conduct of the war might be affected as a result. This variety of roles was reflected in its broader output, ranging from general assessments of

²⁸ JIC(40)71, 'Urgent Intelligence Reports', 17 May 1940. TNA: CAB 81/97.

²⁹ For instance, M.Gilbert. *Continue to Pester, Nag and Bite: Churchill's War Leadership*. (London: Pimlico, 2004). p.13.

³⁰ JIC(41)222, 'A Combined Inter-Service Intelligence and Planning Committee', 24 May 1941. TNA: CAB 81/102.

strategy; monthly reports on the signs of German collapse; weekly papers, based on ULTRA, on what the enemy knew and might expect of Allied plans; to multiple daily operational products on the on-going nature and conduct of the war. Although few of the daily operational and tactical reports have been preserved, it is quite clear that this was the hidden JIC success story of the war.³¹

Post-War

One of the great lessons that emerged from the wartime experience was that intelligence would be central to any future conflict. Not only this, but the inter-war period had shown that detailed planning took years and it would be unrealistic to expect the intelligence community to rapidly shift priority or increase its capabilities. With this in mind, the JIC began to look towards the post-war world in late 1944. The first tangible result was a report on the post-war 'Intelligence Machine', written for the JIC in January 1945. Its authors, Cavendish-Bentinck and Capel-Dunn, characterised the Committee as fundamental to the future of British intelligence. Service budgets and the size of the armed forces were correctly assumed to decline in the inevitable austerity of the post-war world. They argued perceptively, therefore, that this would increase the reliance of British forces in the future on having a steady and reliable stream of intelligence, including strategic warning of the emergence of new threats. The guarantor that this requirement would be met was to be the JIC, through its co-ordinating role and the continuation of its agreed interdepartmental, consensus-based approach to assessments involving policy makers as well as intelligence chiefs.³²

³¹ For more, see Goodman. *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee*.

³² 'The Intelligence Machine', 10 January 1945. TNA: CAB 163/6. For a more detailed examination see M.Herman, 'The Post-War Organization of Intelligence: The January 1945 Report to the Joint Intelligence Committee on "The Intelligence Machine"', In R Dover & M S Goodman (eds), *Learning from the Secret Past: Cases in British Intelligence History* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2011). This includes a copy of the report itself.

Following the end of the Second World War, as the threat from Soviet and later Chinese communism emerged, along with the rise of anti-colonial movements, one of the great difficulties facing British intelligence was that it had to adjust to operating against targets on which there was little current knowledge. The intelligence dominance achieved through ULTRA could not be repeated.³³ The intelligence community had, in particular, to try to assess the intentions and the future military capabilities of the Soviet Union with initially very little hard evidence to go on. The demand was for a much more strategic level of analysis than had been the staple diet of the Committee during the military operations of the war. Yet it also retained a tactical dimension, visible in the 'Weekly Survey of Intelligence', its commentary of current events, and particularly evident at times of crisis.³⁴

The JIC's first major post-war challenge was to determine the future direction of Soviet policy. Herein lay a problem though. A disagreement had arisen between the FO and the COS over attitudes to the Soviet expansion of influence in Eastern Europe. The former did not want to risk antagonising Britain's wartime ally, whereas the latter argued that post-war contingency planning had to be undertaken on the basis of a hostile Soviet Union.³⁵ A consensus on policy towards the Soviet bloc was not reached until several years after the end of the war, essentially brought about by the actions of those in the Kremlin. In the meantime, though, the restrictions that had been imposed by the FO on intelligence gathering against the Soviet target hampered collection efforts.³⁶ The JIC, as the co-ordinator and effective manager of the intelligence community, led discussions with the COS and Ministers about procuring greater funds and resources for the intelligence effort. Although results were, unsurprisingly, slow, by the early

³³ A fascinating review in 1950 considered the 'wartime advantages now lacking'. See JIC(50)81(Final), 'Present State of Intelligence and Measures to Improve It', 3 November 1950. TNA: CAB 158/22.

³⁴ The Weekly Survey of Intelligence, or the Red Book as it became known due to its front cover, are retained in their entirety. A selection of the less sensitive version that covered the same ground, the Weekly Review of Intelligence or the Grey Book, have been released. See TNA: CAB 179.

³⁵ For a more detailed examination see J.Lewis. *Changing Direction: British Military Planning for Post-War Strategic Defence, 1952-1947* (London: Frank Cass, 2003); also Goodman, *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee*. pp.225-35.

³⁶ JIC(46)1(0)(Final)(Revise), 'Russia's Strategic Interests and Intentions', 1 March 1946. TNA: CAB 81/132.

1950s the intelligence community had regained some of this lost time and effort on the Soviet target.³⁷ Furthermore, great strides had been taken in reinforcing the close wartime Anglo-American intelligence relationship and reciprocal cooperation was bearing fruit.³⁸ This was crucial to Britain's efforts but, equally, the diversification of the Cold War brought new challenges, particularly in the form of decolonisation and the JIC's global remit.

A succession of crises ensured that the JIC's position within government as an authoritative source of assessment was secure, even though it was not able to accurately predict several important events, including the Berlin Blockade, the invasion of South Korea by the North, and the intervention of the Chinese in the Korean War.³⁹ Nevertheless, the Committee's performance in steadying the Whitehall ship in rough water was effective: it is clear that senior readers of the JIC product appreciated its sober analysis and examination. Whilst its strategic forecasting sometimes failed, its operational analyses of the resulting situation were generally accurate. The exception to this rule were its broader analyses of events in the Middle East, which were initially coloured by seeing the influence of Moscow as greater than it probably was.⁴⁰ The Suez crisis concluded a turbulent first twenty years for the JIC. It revealed a number of important factors, not least the manner in which the JIC chairman's role proliferated, but more broadly it tested to the limits the JIC's formula of bringing intelligence chiefs together with officials in policy departments to reach key judgments to inform (or not) Government decisions.⁴¹

³⁷ JIC(54)31(Final), 'State of Our Intelligence on the Communist Bloc and Measures to Improve It', 8 June 1954. Cited in Goodman, *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee*. p.256.

³⁸ An interesting first-hand account is provided in W.C.Matthias, *America's Strategic Blunders: Intelligence Analysis and National Security Policy, 1936-1991* (Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 2003).

³⁹ In 1951 the JIC undertook its first serious retrospective analysis of previous assessments, focusing on each of these instances as examples of intelligence failure. See JIC(51)87(Final), 'Review of Assessments Made of Communist Intentions Since January, 1947 by the Joint Intelligence Committee', 12 December 1951. TNA: CAB 158/13.

⁴⁰ For instance, JIC(50)20(Final), 'Communist Influence in the Middle East', 21 April 1950. TNA: CAB 158/9.

⁴¹ Goodman, *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee*. pp.368-418.

The Machinery for Joint Intelligence

Despite its disparate membership – representatives were drawn from the three Services, intelligence, and diplomatic worlds – meetings of the JIC were cordial, sober, serious, and driven by a desire to achieve consensus. The JIC performed more than an assessment role, important though this was. It formed a motor for the central intelligence machinery: an organisation that linked the intelligence world with the policy and military worlds through numerous sub-committees and subordinate regional offshoots. In essence, the JIC in the 1950s was carrying out four main functions:

- i) producing joint, inter-departmental assessments;
- ii) guiding the national intelligence effort by considering, at a senior level, the annual requirements for intelligence and overseeing intelligence liaisons and other community issues;
- iii) helping to bring together the resource requirements of the intelligence agencies and lobbying on their behalf for greater funds;
- iv) and exercising a responsibility for the security of sensitive material.

Beyond this, however, was the broader value increasingly derived by the UK, from having such a variety of senior people from the worlds of policy and intelligence sit down around a table once every week, argue their way to consensus.

Positive perceptions of the JIC were assisted, undoubtedly, by those who sat on the Committee itself. From the dry records of the proceedings of the JIC it is difficult to single out the contributions of an individual to the workings of a Committee, but there are tangible glimpses of the quality of administration and diplomatic skill that Cavendish-Bentinck and his successors brought to his task. He described the role of Chairman as being akin to ‘a sort of conductor’.⁴²

⁴² Cavendish-Bentinck to P Beesly, 10 January 1978. Churchill College, Cambridge: MLBE 3/24.

Cavendish-Bentinck's successor was Harold Caccia. An old Etonian and a rugby player, he was cited on one occasion in *The Times* as having 'run well and opened up the game by means of a number of accurate and well-timed passes to the wings'.⁴³ Caccia had joined the FO in 1929, subsequently serving in China, and as Assistant Private Secretary to Foreign Secretaries Anthony Eden and Lord Halifax, followed by stints in Greece and Algiers. Caccia returned to the FO and in November 1945 assumed Chairmanship of the JIC, though he remained in post only until August 1946. Unfortunately there are no records that tell us anything of Caccia's style as Chairman. Lord Sherfield, his predecessor as Ambassador in Washington, has written that Caccia was 'short, stocky, and bald with a fair complexion. He was forthright in speech and energetic in action, and he retained throughout his life a cheerful and light-hearted, almost boyish, manner, which concealed a serious and thoughtful disposition'.⁴⁴

Caccia's successor as Chairman was another high flyer. William Hayter entered the FO in 1930, subsequently serving in Vienna, Moscow, China and Washington. He returned to London in 1944, and in October 1946 became the JIC's seventh Chairman. One contemporary in the FO has written that during his time in Washington, Hayter was the man who passed on the message to London that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. Remembered as 'able, polished, and with an academic turn of mind...only his closest friends broke through the canopy of charm to discover real warmth in his personality'. Hayter's FO career culminated as Ambassador to the Soviet Union; he resigned in 1958 over his 'disillusionment over Suez'.⁴⁵

Patrick Reilly took over as Chairman in January 1950, remaining in post until April 1953. Reilly had joined the FO in 1933, serving in Tehran, Algiers, Paris, and Athens. Unlike his predecessors, Reilly had already had a varied and in-depth involvement with the

⁴³ 'Eton v. Old Etonians', *The Times* (19 March 1923).

⁴⁴ 'Caccia, Harold Anthony', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁴⁵ 'Hayter, Sir William Goodenough', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

intelligence world, having spent approximately a year in the middle of the war as the personal assistant to the Chief of SIS.⁴⁶ Following his spell on the JIC Reilly became Ambassador, firstly to the Soviet Union and then to France, and was also for a time a Deputy Under-Secretary in the FO.

The final Chairman in this period was Patrick Dean. His FO career started unusually. Graduating in law he was called to the bar in 1934, and then worked as a barrister until the outbreak of war, when he accepted a position as one of the FO's legal advisers. In this capacity he was involved with the Nuremburg war crimes trials, following which he was offered, and accepted, a position in the Diplomatic Service. He was subsequently made head of the German Political Department and served in the Embassy in Rome, before returning to London where, in April 1953, he became Chairman of the JIC. He served in that position for seven years, eventually leaving in July 1960 to become the United Kingdom Permanent Representative to the UN, followed by a stint as Ambassador in Washington. Dean has been described as 'utterly straightforward and loyal both to his superiors and to his subordinates...although clear-sighted and sometimes harsh in his judgments of people he was invariably courteous and tolerant of colleagues who fell short of his standards.'⁴⁷

In one respect their task was a simple one, for as the COS put it: 'the Chairman should inspire initiative and drive in the conduct of intelligence work.'⁴⁸ Chairing the JIC was not a full-time job, and all the post-war figures were also either head of the Permanent Under-Secretaries Department (PUSD) – the part of the FO that liaised with the agencies – or the Deputy Under Secretary responsible for intelligence within the FO. In practice the incumbent was responsible for FO liaison with SIS (including GCHQ) and MI5; for looking after the FO's security department; and for providing FO representation at the COS meetings, the JIC

⁴⁶ Reilly produced a fascinating mini-memoir on this: 'The Secret Service, 1942-3'. Reilly Papers: c.6918, folios 200-250.

⁴⁷ 'Dean, Sir Patrick Henry', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁴⁸ COS to Middle Eastern Land Forces, 22 January 1952. TNA: DEFE 11/350.

meetings (including chairing), and the Joint Planners meetings. Furthermore ‘representation’ was a two-way street, involving a constant dialogue back and forth between the FO and relevant departments. Chairing the JIC was, therefore, not a full-time or sole position; rather it was one task among many.⁴⁹

The FO chairman’s role ensured that a clear and unequivocal link existed between intelligence assessment, community management, operational planning, and the formulation of foreign policy. Yet, the events surrounding Patrick Dean’s role over Suez in 1956 tested the practice of placing the FO policy-making and the intelligence role of the JIC Chairman in the hands of the same official. Suez revealed a general disconnect between the political, military and intelligence planning machineries, with the JIC Chairman intimately involved in all three but unable satisfactorily to influence any of them.

What was it like working on and with the JIC? A fascinating glimpse into this is provided by Chester Cooper, an American representative in London in the mid-1950s, one of whose tasks was to act as liaison with the drafters of the JIC reports, the Joint Intelligence Staff (JIS). Occasionally Cooper would be asked to attend a JIS meeting, and in his memoir he recalls the first time he did so:

I was ushered into a gloomy, crowded, and cluttered conference room dominated by a table covered with a green, tea-stained baize cloth. A dozen or so men were slumped in chairs at the table or haphazardly seated around the room...the owl-like looking man next to me (who mumbled “economist, JIB” when we were introduced) was thoughtfully absorbed in a Greek pentameter he was composing. The navy commander on my other side was dozing...the door flew open and someone shouted, “240 for 6!” I heard cheers and groans. The intruder slammed the door behind him. I barely had a chance to make my profound contribution...when there was a gentle knock on the door. The navy officer stirred himself, opened the door, and happily announced, “Elevenes!” Tea and biscuits were passed around. And then, once again, the door swung open and the mysterious interloper yelled, “310 for 8!”...I quickly learned that my first impression of this group was completely wrong. Yes, they were laconic. Yes, cricket, elevenses, afternoon tea, and Greek pentameters were nontrivial

⁴⁹ This description is provided by Reilly. Reilly papers: c.6920, folio 222. Further details can be found in JIC/1017/47, ‘Review of Intelligence Organisation’, 26 September 1947. CAB 163/7.

considerations...But, as I was soon to discover, they were bright...they were also serious and hardworking.⁵⁰

If Cooper had been startled by his first experiences of London, then it is fair to say that his British counterpart in Washington had a similar baptism:

I was introduced to each individual member by the Chairman...Thereafter the members sat down removing what clothing they thought fit. The gentleman on my right removed his shirt and vest and remained clad in a pair of bright red braces depicting a pair of very undressed ladies. The chair on my left was empty. The late arrival sat down and apparently did not feel the heat as he retained his hat and coat throughout the proceedings. More than half the members sat through-out with their feet on the table. You can imagine my feelings when I thought back on the meetings in the JIC in London!⁵¹

Consensus lay at the heart of JIC considerations: any assessment distributed with a JIC appellation had been signed up to and agreed by all constituent members and it was here that the disparate membership of the Committee was, in many ways, invaluable. The only personal view of this comes from an Assistant Secretary of the JIC in the 1950s, who many years later recalled that of the meetings themselves the ‘atmosphere was good’, and ‘even if two departments were arguing on different sides of the coins; it was done in a very civilised fashion. I didn’t see any fights break out.’ Of the members the chairman was ‘always dominant’. The ‘standard of debate’ was good and this was all thanks to the FO Chairman, whose quality was ‘always high’.⁵²

Yet producing consensus could be problematic. The first difficulty lay in actually reaching an agreement in the first place. JIC papers in this period were drafted by individual members of the JIS, who were not effectively divorced from their parent organisations, and whilst they were supposed to be free from any departmental biases, they were also responsible for liaising with them to gather information. In an attempt to ensure consistency and consensus

⁵⁰ C L Cooper, *In the Shadows of History: 50 Years Behind the Scenes of Cold War Diplomacy* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2005). pp.137-8.

⁵¹ Cited in Goodman, *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee*. p.210.

⁵² Interview with Cecil Alldis, 21 September 2009.

the JIS was regularly given very specific parameters within which to work. These often involved the starting assumptions for the report, as well as the questions that were to be addressed. It would not be an exaggeration to say that although the JIC was, from its early days, permitted to propose its own papers, in attempting to satisfy its readership it became too reliant on questions set by its military masters. Indeed, the JIC was not averse to re-writing a paper if the COS Committee was not happy with it.⁵³ Ordinarily, once finished and approved, all the JIC papers were then transmitted to the COS for further endorsement which, generally speaking, they received. It was then up to the COS to distribute the papers further as they saw fit. Receipt of papers from the JIC was important, for it was recognised that they represented ‘the official opinion of the UK intelligence organisation’.⁵⁴

Another result of seeking consensus was the tendency to word assessments in an equivocal manner, presumably to satisfy all concerned and avoid the need to include dissenting judgments. The intent was to have language that was clear and concise, yet at times those interacting with the JIC must have been left bewildered. Consider the following point on future Soviet actions of which the JIC wanted the COS Committee to take note: ‘...the JIC thought that we could always count on a congenital inability on the part of the Russians to resist any temptation to resort to opportunist overt tactics incompatible with the conduct of a genuine Calming Campaign’.⁵⁵

The JIC’s most important and recognisable task was the production of intelligence assessments. A 1951 retrospective study by the JIC concluded that, on the whole, it had performed well in monitoring Soviet actions, though with some notable failures in predicting

⁵³ This happened, for example, in 1952 with JIC estimates of the overall size of the Soviet bomb force. See H Dylan, *Defence Intelligence and the Cold War: Britain's Joint Intelligence Bureau 1945-1964*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵⁴ JIC/2450/48, ‘Circulation of JIC Reports’, 22 December 1948. Cited in Goodman, *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee*. p.184.

⁵⁵ Confidential Annex to COS(51)140th Meeting, 5 September 1951. TNA: DEFE 11/350. The Calming Campaign referred to the idea that the Russians would try to deliberately relax tensions.

Soviet moves.⁵⁶ Several assumptions underlay its assessments of the Soviet Union, ranging from the conclusion in the early 1950s that Germany was the key to the Cold War, to the belief that Moscow's reach was global even if its underlying trait was to be cautious.⁵⁷ The JIC developed with the military intelligence staffs a huge list of indicators that would suggest the Soviet Union was preparing for war.⁵⁸ In addition to set-piece assessments it provided a weekly summary of worldwide current events. The nature of the JIC's work encompassed what now would be called the functions of horizon scanning, of prediction, early-warning, explanation, and situational awareness. This last function was important because the JIC maintained an organisational structure that could be mobilised and expanded when the need arose.

Understanding the mentality of the Soviet leadership, particularly after the harrowing experiences of the war with Germany, was hard. The JIC struggled to comprehend whether Stalin's actions in the early Cold War period were examples of defensive paranoia or offensive expansionism.⁵⁹ The JIC believed that a key to solving this dilemma was to understand how quickly the Soviet Union would be able to economically recover and reconstruct.⁶⁰ It was concluded early on by the JIC that overtly the Soviets would be cautious and that whilst employing deceit and cunning as a tactic, war would be a final resort.⁶¹ This assumption, immensely difficult to prove or disprove, was soon applied to other theatres.

In the Far East, at least initially, the JIC correctly did not detect the hand of Moscow, though it judged that any indigenous action by client states would need Moscow's approval. In the Middle East, by contrast, particularly in the case of Palestine and Iran, the strength of

⁵⁶ JIC(51)87(Final), 'Review of Assessments Made of Communist Intentions Since January, 1947 by the Joint Intelligence Committee', 12 December 1951. TNA: CAB 158/13.

⁵⁷ This was a position regularly maintained. See, for example, JIC(53)79(Final), 'Likelihood of General War with the Soviet Union Up to the End of 1955', 10 September 1953. TNA: CAB 158/16.

⁵⁸ JIC(48)42(0)Final, 'Indications of Russian Preparedness for War', 18 June 1948. TNA: CAB 158/3.

⁵⁹ JIC(46)1(0)(Final)(Revise), 'Russia's Strategic Interests and Intentions', 1 March 1946. TNA: CAB 81/132. This early paper on Soviet intentions was a fascinating attempt to perceive the Cold War from the perspective of those in the Kremlin. It was a short-lived experiment and no subsequent assessments attempted this.

⁶⁰ JIC(47)7(Final), 'Soviet Interests, Intentions and Capabilities', 6 August 1947. TNA: CAB 158/1.

⁶¹ JIC(50)77(Revise), 'The Likelihood of War with the Soviet Union and the Date by Which the Soviet Leaders Might be Prepared to Risk It', 18 August 1950. TNA: CAB 158/11.

nationalism and communism became conflated in the JIC's view, and the Committee tended to identify underhand tactics on the part of the Soviet Union, even if there was no explicit evidence to support such a judgment.⁶² In the case of Nasser, for example, the JIC was inclined to equate his anti-British stance with a pro-Soviet one.⁶³ The difficulty in all of these instances, as Percy Cradock has observed, was 'in attributing rational motivation to the other side.'⁶⁴ The general lack of high level, reliable and verifiable intelligence had an impact on the quality of analysis. There is an obvious point here: that intelligence assessment tends to be as strong, or as weak, as the intelligence collection which feeds it.

To its credit the JIC frequently began assessments by highlighting the immense difficulties in gathering intelligence, including gaps in its knowledge. A typical example was the opening phrase 'we do not have any good sources of information'. Whether its readership appreciated such candour was not commented upon, but certainly it was good practice to expose the problem. Issues with intelligence collection underlined the importance of another aspect of the JIC's work – liaison. This was conducted at a strategic level and its role and importance can be best demonstrated by the turbulent relationship with the US intelligence community. The war effort ensured that British and American intelligence agencies needed to collaborate, and the UK from the outset assumed the role of senior partner. This assumption, at least on the British part, continued into the immediate post-war period whilst President Truman established a post-war US intelligence community. However, British intelligence increasingly had to rely upon US sources to make up for gaps in its own coverage. Rapidly the balance of power shifted across the Atlantic and the Americans, with their far greater resources, became the dominant partner. On the whole the JIC worked well with its US counterparts, but initial difficulties in comprehending the shifting nature of the relationship, together with the

⁶² See Goodman, *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee*. pp.348-67.

⁶³ JIC(56)10, 'Survey of World Communism in 1955', 20 April 1956. TNA: CAB 158/23.

⁶⁴ Cradock, *Know Your Enemy*. p.294

impact of political rulings on intelligence collaboration (particularly over colonial conflicts and the diplomatic recognition of communist China) created tensions.⁶⁵

The inherent difficulties of trying to avoid surprise, of producing predictive assessments, of attempting to impose a rational explanation of events only dimly perceived, pose epistemological problems of the highest order. The performance of the JIC cannot solely be judged by how often it was surprised by dramatic events. It is also important to recognise that the JIC made an important contribution to day to day planning and policy. The intelligence successes of the Second World War set a precedent that was impossible to replicate and post-war performances of the JIC should not be judged in comparison. A 1952 minute perfectly summarised the JIC's own view on the system:

The British Intelligence machine in the UK is required to deal with a welter of miscellaneous subjects at top speed. It might, in fact, be said without exaggeration that the machine is propelled by a succession of panics, due to insufficient time being available to deal with questions of the highest importance...one cause is undoubtedly the difficulty of sorting out the mass of detailed intelligence available into the form of reasoned appreciations.⁶⁶

The production of regular assessments at both strategic and tactical levels; the weekly forum for discussions between the most senior figures in intelligence, defence and foreign policy; the compiling of almost encyclopaedic references and orders of battle for different countries; and the capability to spring into action in crisis, ensured that the JIC was a vital instrument in defence, foreign and security policy-making. Despite the Suez setback, by 1957 the JIC's position as a central tenet in governmental decision-making was secure. Maurice Hankey's 1935 belief that 'there is a good deal which could be done to put our intelligence on a better footing' had been realised.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ See Goodman, *The Official History of the Joint Intelligence Committee*. pp.206-14.

⁶⁶ JIC/2221/52, 'World-Wide Intelligence Organisation', 30 September 1952. TNA: CAB 176/38.

⁶⁷ M.P.A.Hankey to W.M.James, 31 October 1935. TNA: CAB 21/2651.